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Bipartisan Commission On School Construction Studies Harford Facilities

Posted By [Cindy Mumby](#) On December 10, 2009 @ 7:20 pm In [Featured](#), [The School Yard](#) | [No Comments](#)

With sparks flying over the impact fee, it was easy to overlook a resolution passed unanimously by the Harford County Council in early November that could have big consequences for the way taxpayers fund public school facilities.

[Resolution No. 19-09](#) ^[1] calls for decision-makers in the capital school funding process to meet as a group, formally named the Bipartisan Commission on School Construction, and formulate a long term action plan to "resolve the capital funding needs of our public education system." That means building new schools when necessary, but also maintaining and renovating the schools we already have. It also means taking a hard look at current revenue sources, alternative funding mechanisms, land use regulations and potential changes or additions to state law.

Given the complexity of the task and a 12-month timeline to report findings and recommendations, the goal is ambitious, but born of necessity. With a deep, national economic recession, a whopping \$2 billion state budget deficit and BRAC on Harford County's doorstep, it's also a goal worthy of public support.

The brainchild of Council Member Mary Ann Lisanti, the Commission met for the first time in a conference room at 212 South Bond Street in Bel Air on December 9, 2009. Around the table were Lisanti and fellow Council Member Dick Slutzky, Harford Delegation Chair J.B. Jennings, Delegate Susan McComas, County Treasurer John Scotten (representing County Executive David Craig) and Harford County Board of Education Member John Smilko. School Board Member Don Osman will also serve, but was not able to attend. Kathy Carmello, who handles governmental relations for HPCS was also present.

Despite past skirmishes, including [the most recent one over the new school at Red Pump](#) ^[2], commission members were cordial and cooperative. Lisanti was quickly elected as chair, Smilko was elected vice chair and a plan was established to review the status quo, identify relevant issues, and consider various solutions leading to a plan of action.

The Commission plans to review the school board's long-term capital improvement program and study current funding sources such as the impact fee, alternative funding mechanisms such as public/private partnerships, and consider best practices from other jurisdictions. Plans were also made to review current state mandates and seek consultation with David Lever, executive director of the powerful Maryland Interagency Commission on School Construction, which doles out state funds to the counties. The Commission will also study land use plans and regulations, including Harford County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO), which regulates residential development in overcrowded school districts, and the county's Land Use Element Plan, which supports the Master Plan and the development envelope concept.

Lisanti said the Commission will create a presentation schedule which will allow members to gather information, ask questions, and consult with their respective groups and the public before developing an action plan. The resolution establishing the Commission calls for a final report to be issued in time for the 2011 General Assembly session.

After the meeting, Lisanti emphasized the need for public engagement in the work of the Commission. She said she hoped the community would make suggestions and attend meetings, which are open to the public. The next meeting of the Bipartisan Commission on School Construction is planned for late January, 2010 with details to be announced.

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URLs in this post:

[1] Resolution No. 19-09: <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/WebLink7/DocView.aspx?id=511370>

[2] the most recent one over the new school at Red Pump:
<http://www.daggerpress.com/2009/03/27/red-pump-redux-elementary-school-on-vale-road-gains-support/>